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Pregnancy, Delivery and Miscarriage among the Inhabitants of the Island of Sakhalin (Gilyak and Ainu) /Schwangerschaft, Entbindung und Fehlgeburt bei den Bewohnern der Insel Sachalin (Giljaken und Ainu)/

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753 Inhabitants of Sakhalin Island (Gilyak and Ainu).
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I. The Gilyak

The house of birth.

Among the Gilyak the act of birth is considered unclean and therefore is never allowed to take place in the yurt, their home. That is why not only in summer, but even in winter during the worst periods of frost and snowstorms, the woman in labor is led to a hut built especially for her near the home. The choice of the place makes it clear that the Gilyak feel no respect for the act of birth, for the hut mentioned above is built in the bushes which serve as a privy for the
562 women. The location of these bushes is always
841 definitely fixed, and no man would ever walk in that
753 direction. The boys are strictly forbidden to run or to look around there, and they are warned that they will contract a disease called taremynd if they step into a trace of women's blood. The disease begins with a paralysis of the hands and feet, the afflicted person loses the ability to move, loses weight and finally dies, for the disease is incurable.

844 As soon as the labor pains start the woman is
183 brought into the lan-raf or the "house of birth". This "house of birth" is erected hurriedly at the very last moment. Built of wooden boards roughly put together and covered with old bark from fir trees, it looks more like a dog house than like the room destined to welcome a new inhabitant of the world longingly expected by his parents. In the eyes of the Gilyak there is no conflict between the affection and love of the parents for the newly born child and the severe, if not cruel welcome, it is given. The child will go through a hard, more than Spartan education, and its life will be full of worries and hardships in a neither opulent nor gentle nature. This is why no Gilyak even comes to think that the first entrance into the world might be easier and more wholesome for the little guest if it took place in the presence of other people under other and better circumstances.

844 When the woman in labor goes to the place made
291 ready for her, she is clad in old soiled clothes. If the weather is cool she takes more clothes along. The only distinction in clothing worn during labor is that the woman in labor takes off the trousers, a garment that Gilyak women wear in summer and winter.

844 Usually an older woman who herself has gone
835 through several childbirths helps the woman in labor. If [757] such a midwife, called lanaven szauk, is not at hand the husband of the woman in labor can take her place; but under no circumstances may another male member of the family take this place, not even the younger brother of the husband, although, according to the customs of the Gilyak he has a right to the wife of his older brother and considers himself in a way her husband and certainly the second father of the child.

844 The Birth.

753 During the delivery the woman in labor sits and does not stretch her legs. The seat is erected at the same height as the bed in the yurt, that is about half a yard above the floor. During the whole period of delivery the woman in labor is supposed to keep quiet, not to strike out in pain, not to try to get up, not to lean over to one side or the other. If, during a hard delivery, the woman is not able to stay in the prescribed attitude by herself and starts writhing in pain, it is the duty of the midwife or husband to hold her up at her shoulders in order to prevent her from making the forbidden movements. The Gilyak believe that women who try to get up during the delivery contract a disease which causes a deformation of the spine. Once I was even shown a young woman who had become a cripple because she had not stayed quiet while in labor. Her spine was really deformed or, as the Gilyak say, broken (naski ts' onkrynd). She was not able to walk and died a few years later.

845 If the labor pains last too long and the woman suffers too badly, a piece of clothing is moved back and forth in front of her face and somebody blows down from above on the part in her hair.

844 The mother delivers the child herself, and only if the mother is entirely too weak does the midwife help at the delivery.

The Gilyak do not know how to give obstetric help to a woman in labor. If a woman is not able to deliver the child she dies, and, in this case, the child will perish too. But that happens very rarely. During a more than ten years' stay in the region of the river Tym I heard only once that a woman died during the delivery.

Among the Gilyak the first childbirth is considered to be the hardest. It is especially hard and painful for very young women who are not fully developed physically.

845 Girls are strictly forbidden to laugh when people
784 talk of delivery or confinement, and they are supposed to stay serious during the act of birth. If they fail to do so, in the future they will go through very hard deliveries and suffer exceedingly great labor pains.

844 In order to speed up the discharge of the placenta chiplings of a certain wood (sambucus racemosa) are put into the mouth of the woman in labor. The bitter disgusting taste of the wood causes vomiting which, according to the belief of the Gilyak, should accelerate the discharge of the placenta (ehlaud cuind, that is: the child's food). But, if the placenta nevertheless is not discharged after a while the woman dies. This [758] happens rarely but does occur once in a while among the Gilyak. The placenta is wrapped in a towel and hung up on a tree in the wood not far from the house.

845 If a child is born with a caul which, however,
777 happens very rarely, the caul is not thrown away but is carefully dried and kept with other household articles. For the Gilyak believe that this caul which in the language of their tribe, is called ehlan ok (the suit of the child) brings luck to the whole family.

844 The newly born child is not simply called a boy or
553 a girl. If a girl was born it is, for the time being, called mukin ehlan, that is: tailless child (mukind usually is the name for a dog with a very short tail). But if a boy was born his relatives say: moi ivend panend, that is: one who has a penis was born.

844 The mouth of the newly born child is cleaned of the
853 mucus with the help of a finger, whereupon the child is given the mother's breast for nursing immediately. The next day the mother washes the child with cold water, but she does not pour it directly on the body of the child, but takes it into her mouth first and only then applies it to the child, which, of course, raises the temperature of the "bath". In this way the child is washed twice a day for two years.

856 If the newly born child has a defective limb nobody tries to mend the damage. It is also not a custom among the Gilyak to form the soft head of the baby.

846 It is recommended that young women walk around a
844 great deal after they have given birth to a child, while
262 sitting is recommended for older women. Women of
273 all ages are advised to move around as much as possible before they give birth to a child.

Women are strictly forbidden to drink cold water during a period of ten days before and after the delivery. If there is no tea at hand the sick woman is given cooled boiled water if she is thirsty. During that period she is not allowed to eat red-meat-fish (salmon); salted food is forbidden as well as eating a black berry that grows in the tundra (empetrum nigrum). Taking hard liquor before giving birth to a child is considered harmful, but later on it is considered to be healthy. In general liquor is consumed very rarely, and the Gilyak on Sakhalin consume very little alcohol compared to other inhabitants of this island.

843 Miscarriages.

Natural miscarriages (ryrnnd) occur very frequently among the Gilyak; they are considered quite harmless and not even looked at as an illness. I was told that there was scarcely a woman who had not experienced one or two miscarriages in the course of her life. But not a single inhabitant with whom I discussed it knew of a woman who always miscarried and was not able to carry the fetus in her abdomen throughout the normal period of pregnancy. I do not intend to state the causes of the frequent miscarriages among the Gilyak for lack of sufficient [759] data. I will, therefore, leave the answer to this question to the

843 medical profession. It is possible that the Gilyak belong to a race which is constitutionally inclined to miscarriages. I believe, however, that in this respect it is of great importance that the woman is worn out from perpetual heavy work and that there is a complete lack of consideration for the pregnant woman. Among the Gilyak the immense burden of domestic work is at no time alleviated for the woman during her pregnancy. No man deems it necessary to protect his wife while she is carrying the baby to be born. The eventual miscarriage he attributes without compunction to insignificant causes. The Gilyak believe, for instance, that a miscarriage takes place if a child hits his pregnant mother's face with a strap or a long wooden object, such as a spoon, an arrow, a toy, a wooden knife or a fishing hook. Hitting a pregnant woman with a twig or a little stick recently cut off a tree or bush is considered harmless. A violent blow or a fall can cause a miscarriage too.

844 Behavior of the husband.

The Gilyak has a strange way of expressing his worries about his wife during her labor pains: he unties everything that can possibly be untied. First on himself: he undoes the braids in which his hair is plaited and he unties his shoelaces and top sleeves. Next, he unties or loosens whatever might, at that time, be tied up in the house or in its neighborhood. In the yard, he takes the axe out of the block; he loosens the boat if it is tied to a tree; he takes the cartridges out of the gun and the arrows out of the cross-bow. An image of pity without a belt, he creeps from one corner to another or he lies around pondering what else he might untie or loosen somewhere, for he is convinced that the labor pains and their duration depend upon whether he has overlooked and missed loosening something.

846 Only after the navel of the child is healed is the man allowed to start working or to go hunting, to leave the house on business and visit his relatives or friends. Neither at this period nor later on is the birth of the child celebrated by a festivity in the house or by a meal.

General remarks.

Throughout this period of time the woman who has

846 given birth to a child does not leave her place, the hut; only during the most severe spells of frosty weather is she allowed to go to the dwelling place, in case she herself is the housewife. If she is not the housewife she cannot expect to be taken into the house
846 by another woman. Mishaps occurring to weak women
776 in confinement who were left to themselves in the hut are attributed to evil spirits. In order to keep these spirits out of the "house of birth", in which one of the most important and mysterious natural events takes place, a large axe is placed at the entrance of the hut designed to banish the evil spirits. But this convenient and easy way of protection is not always sufficient. I recall a Gilyak called Kan coming hurriedly to me for help [760] because his wife, who was compelled to do all the work in the narrow and disgusting hut, even to sewing and chopping wood, had, inadvertently, hurt his newly born son's head. On another occasion, the hut in which the wife of a Gilyak friend of mine was in confinement caught fire when she had started a fire in order to warm her chilled limbs. The fact that such mishaps do not occur as frequently as one should expect is due to the admirable strength of character and fortitude of the Gilyak woman who, even worn out and sick, never loses her presence of mind and her ability to work. It is the might of her motherly love which, in such moments, increases her will power and her fortitude to a degree unknown and incomprehensible to men.

847 Unmarried Gilyak women, fearing the disgrace
163 which they would have to suffer, sometimes effect artificial miscarriages; they use the same means which are said to cause natural miscarriages. But their skill in committing abortion is not great, for there are many cases of infanticide.

Once in a while it happens that a Gilyak woman gives birth to a dead child; but that happens so infrequently that I could not be shown a single woman to whom that had happened.

834 The Gilyak very much dislike talking about sexual
864 matters and about facts connected with them. That is probably the reason why the appearance of a new member of the family is explained to children in such

834 a way that every discussion of the fact is precluded.
864 If the baby was born in the summer, the children are told that it was taken from under the roots of a tree or trunk; if a baby was born in winter, one pretends to have found it in the snow.

845 Twin births.

163 No tribe on Sakhalin Island has reported the birth of triplets to any woman at any time. That is why there are no legends about such an event either.

Not infrequently twin births take place among the natives. They contend that in each one of these cases both children are of the same sex. I personally came to know two living twins of the Gilyak tribe who were between forty and forty-five years old. In regions rather well known to me there occurred three twin births in a population of more than 300 persons within a decade, but all these twins died immediately after birth. When I left in 1905 there were five month old twins living in the family of a Gilyak friend of
845 mine. Only in a single old Gilyak song which I wrote
539 down are twins of different sex mentioned. The
776 brother is in love with his sister and, in this song, asks her to take his heart into her hands, or else he will die.

The Gilyak are convinced that one of the twins is the son of the god of the woods and mountains, pal-ni-rookh (mountain man), a mighty deity now benevolent, now malevolent towards the poor, weak Gilyak. [761] (1) That is why the child of the pal-ni-rookh, should be given back to his father right away. But, not being certain which of the children is not an offspring of human beings one prefers to treat them both equally.

845 It is a custom among the majority of the Gilyak to
766 cremate dead bodies (2), but twins are not allowed to

1. I was, however, given another explanation by a Gilyak: one of the twins is said to be an offspring of the mountains, the other one an offspring of the sea.

2. In general, only those Gilyak tribes

845 who are descendents of the Ainu bury
766 their bodies in the earth.

be cremated after their death. If that were done all those present at the ceremony would be punished with the loss of their eyesight. Even the parents of twins have to be buried in the earth, because they too have become relatives of the god of the mountains. The children of twins, however, are considered to be ordinary members of the tribe, and at their funeral there is no deviation from the custom.

845 If twins stay alive and grow up they remain, for the
551 rest of their lives, the object of awe for all their
769 neighbors and friends although there may be enough proof that they lack every kind of supernatural power. At every meeting, either in friendship or in hostility, the others remind them of their unusual progenity and everybody attributes to them that mysterious innate power. Each of the twins bears the name he gave himself as a child. The custom of giving the child the name of a dead ancestor is not followed in the case of twins. The names of the twins are neither given to another child in the same family nor to another child in the tribe. Here too we see a deviation from the general custom of giving children the names of dead ancestors.

845 The greatest awe is felt for those twins who die in
766 childhood. The offspring of the spirits of the
782 mountains who, while living among ordinary human
775 beings for a short time, who did not get used to them and did not feel he was one of them, has especially the power to do harm to people; that is why they try hard to win his favor. The family who had harbored the unwelcome offspring of the mountains constructs a little model of a Gilyak yurt and puts it either on a little board inside the house or outside in the open. A little figure carved in wood which represents the dead child is put into that little hut. The members of the family consider it necessary to give some of the food they eat themselves to that little figure every day. This rule is strictly followed not only by the parents of the twins but also by the two following generations. Only the great-grandchildren, observing ceremonial rites, carry the little figure with its

845 dwelling to the top of a near-by mountain; there, for
766 the last time, choice food is offered to the figure.
782 Next to the sacrificial objects a one to two meter long
775 stick carved in curly design is dug into the ground;
they call it nau. From this moment on the whole tribe
is safe [762] from being haunted by the dead child,
tonhr ehlian, without further prayers or sacrifices.
753 If the relatives neglect to follow these rules, which
845 are designed to appease the awe-inspiring spirits of
776 the mountains and to win their favor, they evoke their
anger. Several diseases which attack the parents and
relatives of the twins are considered to be symptoms
of their revenge (tohr.ehlian). These usually are
certain diseases like deformation of the jaw-bone,
squint-eyes, stiffening of the neck or any kind of
convulsions. The appearance of such diseases is
considered to be a consequence of the mountain
spirit's dissatisfaction; in such cases one says
"tonhr ehlian singrund", that is "the twin child is
tormenting".
784 The Gilyak are so afraid of these dangers that
845 young women and girls are strictly forbidden to listen
777 to reports about such happenings; by these precautions,
they believe, they will be able to prevent the birth of
twins. Women are neither allowed to borrow house-
hold articles nor to accept gifts from friends who had
given birth to twins. In this case old soft objects are
considered to be the most dangerous ones. Hard
objects, however, especially tools made of metal, do
not transfer the bad luck of the former owner to the
new one.
842 It is altogether a trait characteristic of this northern
777 tribe that they believe in the possibility of the
transference of physical peculiarities from one man
to another man by way of his tools. This gives us an
explanation for the superstitious remedies they use
for overcoming a woman's sterility. The woman who
cannot bear children must ask another very fertile
woman to lend her the waistband of her trousers and
she has to wear it up to the moment of the desired
success. A Gilyak told me that fertility can be
transferred from one person to another like a
contagious disease, for example by way of a vessel
which had been used by the sick person.